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SUBJECT: MOSQUE SERMONS FOR SAUDI ARABIA JUNE 9: AL-KHOBAR
IMAM CLAIMS WESTERN PLOT TO ANNIHILATE ISLAM; SERMON FROM
MECCA REMINDS MUSLIMS TO FEAR GOD; MEDINA SERMON DEVOTED TO
PROPER USE OF LEISURE TIME. IN ASIR, GOVERNMENT WARNS
CLERICS TO AVOID POLITICAL SERMONS.

REF: 05 JEDDAH 5022

Classified By: Acting Consul General Hector Morales, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

FROM EASTERN PROVINCE: IMAM CRITICIZES UNITED STATES AND
ALLIES ATTACKS ON SHARI'AH

¶1. (C) This week, Shaikh Mohammad al-Qahtani devoted his sermon at the Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal Mosque in al-Khobar to a wide-ranging attack on the United States and its Western cohorts for their efforts to destroy Islam. The sermon began with a resum of the Danish Cartoon controversy and his charge that this represented part of America's and its Western allies "war of annihilation" against Islam. He alleged that the U.S. and its allies seek to undermine Islam by constantly attacking the foundations of Islamic law and jurisprudence, the Shari'ah. He claimed that most of these attacks are not as public as the Danish Cartoons but are equally dangerous. "America and the West," asserted the imam, continue to pressure countries that have constitutions wholly or in part based on the Shari'ah to 'amend' sections that America views as unacceptable by its standards. If this is not enough," he continued, "there are some Arab countries actively working to help America reach its goal."

IMAM CHARGES THAT AMERICA ONLY SUPPORTS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR
NON-MUSLIMS

¶2. (C) The imam informed his congregation that "One change America would like to see is the issue of religious freedom. America wants laws that will afford protection to people who convert to other religions. True enough. The only problem," insisted the imam, "is America wants this protection to work one way: protection for people who leave Islam and convert to another religion, like Afghanistan's Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Manan. America has done everything it can to make this possible and to stop the spread of Islam. It has shut down Muslim charities, Quranic learning institutions, schools, non-profit organizations, social centers, financial institutions, businesses, private donation drives, others that provide aid, food and medicine to needy people and countries. On the other hand, America has pressured Arab countries to allow Christian organizations to work and expand in Muslim countries."

IMAM CITES CASES OF AFGHAN APOSTATE AND COPTIC CONVERT

13. (C) The imam illustrated his charge using the case of the Afghan and another case he said occurred in Egypt. "This is what happened with the Christian convert Abd al-Rahman." He described the support and assistance provided to Abd al-Rahman by President Bush, Secretary Rice, and particularly noted the intervention of Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi and the Pope. He also identified by name the Washington Post and New York Times and read their commentaries on the case. "Abd al-Rahman," according to al-Qahtani, "was a pawn the West has used to chip away at Islam" and insisted that the West "has come out victorious because the Arabs offered little or no resistance." The imam compared the Afghan affair to that of a Coptic woman in Egypt who had converted to Islam. Al-Qahtani claimed that President Bush and Secretary Rice remained silent while she was forcibly

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returned to her church and forced to renounce her new faith. The imam questioned America's credibility when it calls Arab and Muslim countries to grant legal protection, democratic rights and freedom of religion to all people, "meaning Muslims who convert to other faiths, but does the exact opposite when the shoe is on the other foot." Pointing explicitly at Egypt, al-Qahtani criticized the country for signing an agreement that permits Christian organizations to establish a presence in the country, "which is 90% Muslim in order to try to win as many new converts as possible in the name of 'freedom of religion.'"

FROM MECCA: IMAM WARNS FLOCK TO FEAR GOD

4, (U) On June 9, Shaykh Usamah bin-Abdallah Khayyat, imam at the Grand Mosque in Mecca admonished his listeners to

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"fear none but Allah." He said the trials and tribulations of life should not cause Muslims to forget their faith or fear anything but God. His second sermon repeated this theme. The concluding prayer contained the usual plea for God to support Islam and destroy its enemies. It also asked success for the King and Crown Prince in promoting the well-being of the country and people.

FROM MEDINA: IMAM COMMENTS ON PROPER FORMS OF LEISURE AND RECREATION

15. (U) School having ended the preceding Wednesday and Saudi families now embarking on their summer vacations, Imam Shaykh Abd-al-Bari Bin-Awad al-Thubayti, at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, devoted his sermons to the timely issue of permissible uses of leisure time. The imam observed that "leisure time renews the worker's activity and movement, clears his mind, and protects his body from sluggishness and dullness." He cited the Prophet's statements supporting the importance of leisure time. However, he cautioned the congregation that "Leisure time is that which there isn't a woman undressing, an incest being excited, or a tendency to evil being inflamed." He warned youths against spending leisure time in corrupt ways, such as taking narcotics. He counseled that "a Muslim does not go beyond a limit in pursuit of new vistas of recreation." He recommended that families "prepare programs and places for the benefit of your child to remove boredom and protect your son from utter loss. (Note: Apparently girls aren't subject to the same temptations as boys. End note.) Leisure time must be used to befriend the righteous, read a good book and do work that protects the future and honor."

16. (U) Al-Thubayti's sermon ended with a prayer for God to

"support Islam and Muslims and humble non-believers,... preserve our Muslim brethren in Palestine... and Iraq,...and protect them from every evil and make the plots of their enemies turn against them."

IN ABHA, GOVERNMENT WARNS IMAMS AGAINST POLITICALLY-CHARGED SERMONS

17. (U) In a related development, on June 12, the English-language newspaper the "Arab News" reported on a meeting between government officials and 300 imams in Asir Governate, which is located in south-western Saudi Arabia, north of the Yemen border (reftel). The conclave was described as the first of its kind sponsored by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in an effort to promote moderation and restrain deviant imams. The governor of Asir, Prince Khaled al-Faisal (reftel) exhorted the imams to expose deviants who try to undermine the Kingdom's stability and destroy its achievements. He told the assembled clerics: "You should try to spread love, peace and patriotism among the people and encourage them to participate in the development process and protect the country's security and stability." The Prince described the government's program to establish mosques and promote the welfare of Islamic scholars and imams (prayer leaders) and khateebis (imams who deliver the Friday sermon at mosques). He warned them to avoid using mosques to deliver political sermons.

GOVERNMENT WATCHING MOSQUES IN EFFORT TO PROMOTE MODERATION AND TOLERANCE

18. (U) The article further relates that the Director General of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs office in Asir, Dr. Abdullah Al-Humaid, said that the ministry had fired almost 200 imams last year for failing to follow government guidelines. The doctor is quoted as saying that "We have deployed a number of supervisors to monitor the performance of imams and khateebis, especially the sermons they give on Fridays and the speeches they deliver after prayers." As background, the article reports that there are about 70,000 mosques in the Kingdom, of which approximately 15,000 hold Friday prayer services. The ministry's guidelines are formulated by "a panel of prominent Islamic scholars."
Morales